snow gnome pyrography

Lora S Irish

Introduction:

While cleaning the studio, getting ready for the autumn and winter season projects, I came across an old, 7" x 12" x ¾" birch slab.

It is so old that it has begun to wrap slightly, the back is very dirty from years of lying at the bottom of the storage box, and the front has begun to develop a golden yellow patina.

This piece of birch is not in good enough shape to use for a special project, but it still is in great enough shape to use with some limitations.

Because it is already showing some signs of warping, it will work well as an outdoor project where warping is to be expected.

What better use for this birch slab than to turn it into a Gnome Snow Gauge! After the burning steps, and the finishing steps, he can rest against my front porch post where I can use him to track this winter's snow accumulations.

So, let's go have some pyrography fun!

~
Lora

Right is shown the ruler pattern that I used. You can resize the full Gnome Snow Gauge pattern to fit your particular board. Now print a copy of the ruler pattern to place over your resized pattern, keeping your measurements accurate.

10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
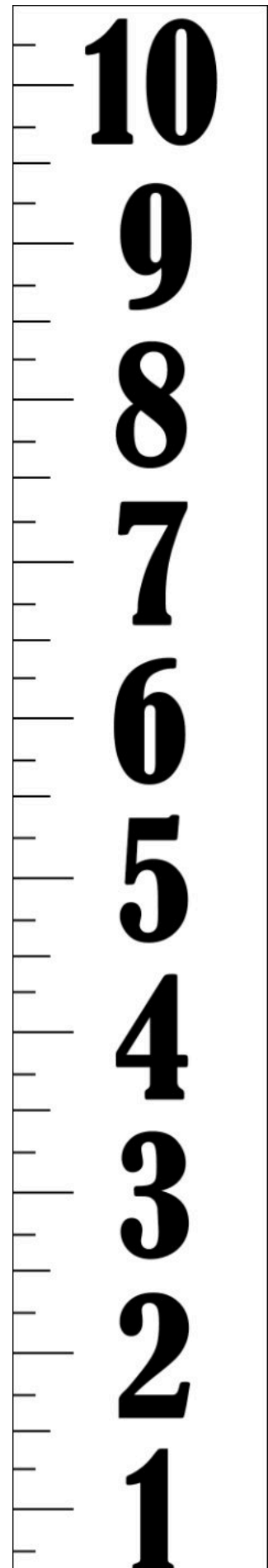
Some quick notes before we begin

Choosing your wood burning unit

While there are several excellent manufactured professional pyrography units available to the crafter today, most of us start with a simple one-temperature, soldering style burning pen.

You can control the tonal value, stroke width, and temperature of the burn by how quickly you move the pen across the wood. Quick movements make thin, light burns. Slow movements allow the tip to burn darker tones.

Any wood burning pattern, no matter how detailed, can be worked with this basic tool.
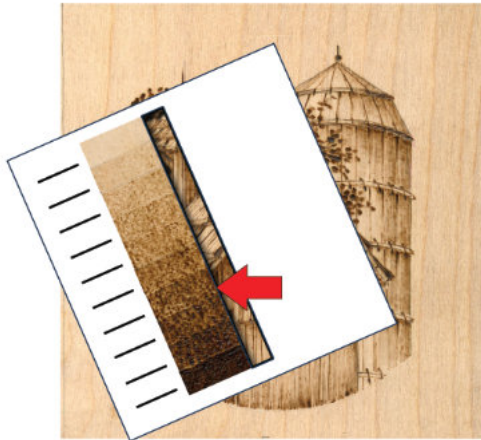
Textures and tips

Each tool tip has its own burning edge profile. The ball and loop tip are often used for fine line work. The spear or spoon shader is used to blended shading, and the curved or flat shader is used to create crisp edges to your shading area.

Grab a scrap of birch plywood and discover the fun texture strokes you can make using each of your tool tips.

Sepia Tonal Values

Wood burning creates beautiful rich brown colored strokes on your board,; this coloration is called sepia.

The paleness or darkness of the brown is called a tonal value. The whitest tonal value on your project is the unburned original coloring of the wood. The darkest will be nearly black.

Hand Position

Hold your burning pen in a comfortable, normal writing position. Let your hand lightly rest on the surface of your project, allowing the side of the hand to move easily across the board. You can use the tip of your smallest finger to anchor your hand position when working fine lines and detailing.

Cleaning your pen tips

All pen tips will build up a light layering of carbon as they are used. Heavy carbon build-up cam cause your pen tips to burn unevenly, or leave dark smudges on the project.

Remove the carbon using a leather strop and rouging compound. A light layer of compound is placed on the raw side of the leather strop, and your pen tip is pulled across that area of the leather to remove most of the dark carbon.

Turn your strop over to the tanned side of the leather to bring your tips back to a bright finish.
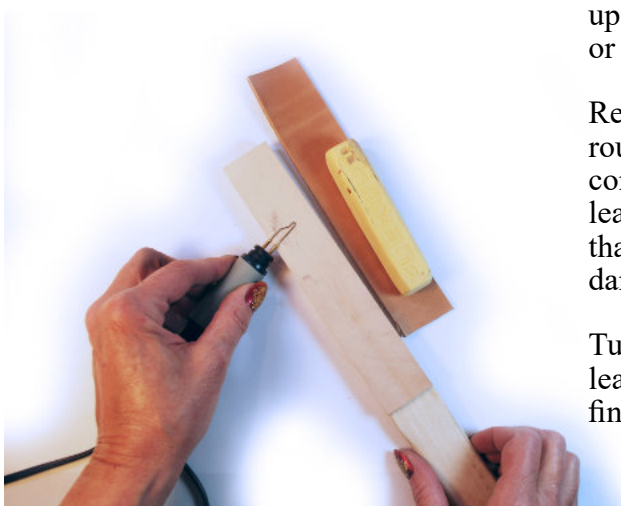
Supplies:

7" x 12" x ¾" birch slab
rheostat or variable temperature pyrography pen
        ball, flat shader, loop, and spoon tips
220-grit sandpaper
white artist's eraser
low-tack painters tape
Saral transfer paper (graphite tracing paper)
Winsor Newton Professional Fixative
ModPodge Gloss Sealer and Finish
Zenacolor 120 Watercolor Pencil set
Grumbacker 30 Soft Pastel set

Colored pencils come in three main varieties - student grade, artist grade, and watercolor.

Student grade pencil are chalk based. While very inexpensive they do not blend or build up to vibrant colors because of that chalk.

Artist grade pencil are wax based, blend easily and can be layered to create new colors.

Watercolor pencils are compressed watercolor paint. They build up quickly on wood, have intense colors, and can be blended.

Watercolor Pencil Chart
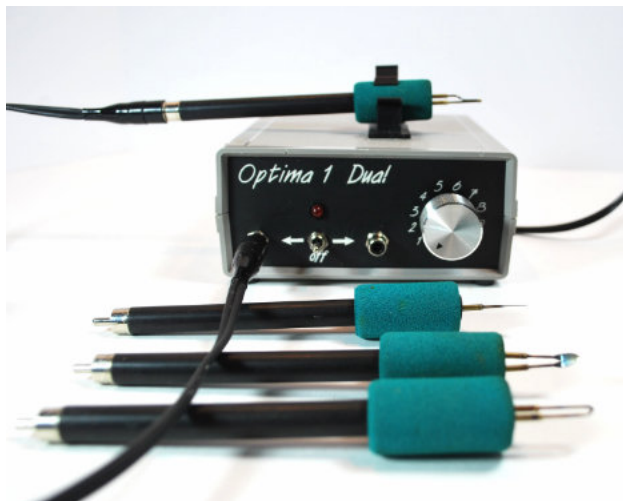

- Cadmium Yellow
- Apple Green
- Forest Green
- Medium Teal
- Raw Sienna
- True Blue
- Medium Peach
- Medium Pink
- Cadmium Orange
- Cadmium Red
- Light Blue
- Medium Purple
- Onyx Black
- Titanium White
  Titanium White Soft Pastel

Pyrography Burning Units

This beginner's project can be worked with a one-temperature pen unit that uses interchangeable brass tips. Available at most craft stores - online or brick and mortar - this unit can be purchased for less that $20 USD.

I chose to use my Walnut Hallow Creative Tool,costing around $100 USD, which has temperature control, a very flexible pen cord, and four interchangeable tips. This is a great intermediate unit for crafters looking for more control over their tonal value settings.

I also use two high-end pyrography units - one is my Colwood and the other an Optima. Both have fixed tip pens, which transfer the heat from the unit evenly and constantly. My Optima is a dual unit which allows me to have two pens working at the same time.

Walnut Hallow Unit Pen Tips

Shown in the pen is the loop tip. From top to bottom are the spoon shader, ball tip, and flat shaping tips.

Optima Dual Pen Unit

Walnut Hallow Unit

Step 1: Prepare the board, trace your pattern

Since I am working on an older board I began by cleaning the entire front and back with a white artist's quality eraser. This removes most of the dust and grime that had built up over the years. Next, clean the eraser dust from the board using a dry, clean cloth.

Lightly sand the front of the board using 220-grit sandpaper. Work your sanding strokes with the grain of the wood to avoid adding small cross-grain scratches. Remove the dust using a dry, clean cloth.

Print a copy of your pattern. If you resize the pattern it will resize the ruler marks. Replace those marks using the ruler pattern shown on page 3.

Position your paper pattern over your board. Secure one edge of the pattern to the board using painter's low-tack tape. Slide a sheet of graphite tracing paper under the pattern, graphite side down against the board. With a pencil or ink pen trace the pattern lines to your board.
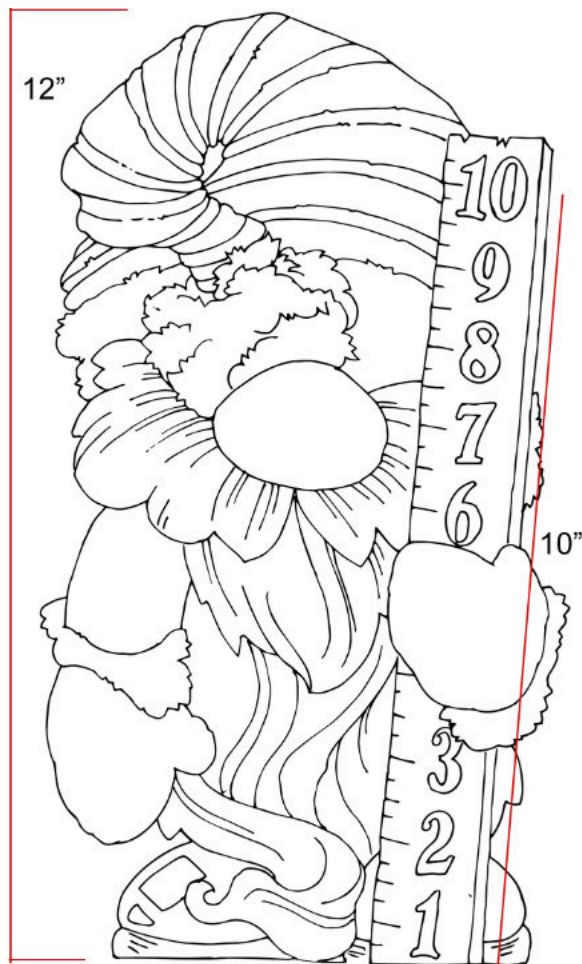
Step 2: Work the darkest areas of the pattern

I began the burning using a high temperature setting and my spoon shader tip.
A simple touch-and lift stroke using this tip leaves a nice, black oval shape.
That texturing is used to create the fur in the ball of the hat and the fur around
his mittens.

Turn down your temperature to a medium hot setting. Using the spoon shader
to shade the chin beard and his sleeve with short pull strokes.

[Wood burning media](#)

This project was worked on a
birch slab. Birch is a
hardwood and does require
temperatures in the medium to
high range for good sepia
tones.

Also consider trying this
pattern on basswood, or poplar.
But are readily available in
pre-cut board sizes and
plywood.

Step 3: Work the numbers and shoes

Using your ball tip and a hot temperature, fill in the letters of the ruler and his shoes using a touch-and-lift stroke. The ball tip leaves a nice, round dot that can be used to fill these areas completely.

Using the medium hot setting and the ball tip, outline the edges of the ruler, mark the ¼" increments, and work the shading on the side of the ruler and in the sleeve. These areas are worked in a simple touch-and-pull line stroke.

Working a simple pencil line grid that matches the curve of his mittens will help you in the placement of the small knitting "v" strokes that imply yarn.

The pencil will be erased at the end of the burning process and only your burn strokes will show.

You can purchase white artist quality erasers at most craft or office supply store. Colored erasers as the pink eraser on the end of a common #2 pencil. Can leave colored streaks on the wood and are nearly impossible to remove without sanding the area with 220-grit sandpaper.

Step 4: Texture the hair

The beard hair can be worked using either the ball tip or loop tip of your pen. Both create an even, fine line stroke. Pull medium temperature lines onto the beard area, creating wave groupings of hair. Darken some hair grouping and shade under the mustache and beard curl by adding more fine lines worked at a hotter temperature.

Work a few medium temperature lines into the soles of the boots.

Step 6: Add texture to the mittens

Using a medium hot setting and my loop tip, I burned small v-shapes into the mitten areas to imply a knitted yarn stitch.

Lay your loop tip on its side, using the widest point of the loop for this stroke. Touch-pull-and lift to create each side of the v.

Return to your spoon shader to work the medium temperature shading along the sides and bottom of each mitten.

Step 7: Shading and striping the hat

Using a medium setting and either the ball tip or loop tip, work a scrubbie stroke into the the entire hat on both sides to establish the shading. Work a second layer of scrubbie strokes over the stripe shading areas. Add some dark, thin lines along each of the stripes to set them apart from the rest of the hat.

Repeat this step in the fur hat brim area.

Step 8: Shade the bottom of the nose

With your flat shader tip and a medium temperature setting, create long curved line strokes at the bottom of the nose to give the nose its shading.

Not all tracing lines need to be outlined. If an area is strongly defined just by your shading an outline is not necessary.

So outlines do not need to be continuous. The outlines along the hat stripes are broken, which helps with the yarn impression of this area.

Step 9: Deepen your shading, add detailing lines

Take a few moments to check where you might need to darken your shading strokes or add fine details. For my gnome I added more tonal value to the hat area, and his long beard beneath his chin beard to push it farther into the background.

Added detail lines were worked throughout the design.

Step 10: [Clean up](#)

Using a white artist's eraser, clean the entire board front to remove any small wood fibers lifted during the burning process and any pencil or graphite marks from the pattern tracing. Remove the eraser dust using a dry, clean cloth.

Step 11: White watercolor pencil highlights

Begin the colored pencil work by using titanium white to establish the highlight areas of the coloring.

Step 12: Adding other colors

Begin adding your other colors. Watercolor pencils can be built up quickly using just a slight amount of pressure to the tip. Several layers of color are often needed to increase the depth of pencil work over any pyrography project or wood surface.

You can lay one color of pencil over another to create new colors. The gray-blue hat brim fur is worked with layers of white, true blue, royal purple, and raw sienna brown.

His hat uses three shades of green, plus cadmium yellow for the bright highlights. True blue and royal purple are used on the hat stripes.

A light shading of raw sienna on the hat ball makes this area a light tone of brown which separates it from his white mustache, chin beard, and beard.

The mittens are worked using medium teal, cadmium orange, and cadmium yellow.

To make his nose the brightest area of the project I used peach, cadmium orange, and medium pink.

Step 13: Intensify the colors

Watercolor pencils can often only be applied to a certain color depth before that area will stop accepting new layers. This is true whether you are using your pencils on paper, gourd, or wood.

Both regular artist quality colored pencils and watercolor pencils have a base media of wax. When the wax on the work becomes thick enough it rejects new layers of color.

Use a light coat of Spray Reworkable Fixitive on your project when this happens. The fixitive gives a new sealed surface that transparent, non-glossy, and a slight texture. New layers of watercolor pencils can now to added because the reworkable fixitive has sealed the wax finish of the previous layers.

Use can rework your project several times, using more fixitive spray when needed, to bring your coloring to a bright, bold look.

To intensify the white areas, after the last layer of watercolor pencils I used a white soft pastel stick.

Pastels easily adhere to the wood and reworkable fixitive surface. Fine lines are create be using the corner of the pastel stick, wide areas can be colored using the side of the stick, and they can be blended by gently rubbing the area with a dry fingertip.

Step 14: Add one more layer of fixitive, then seal the wood using ModPodge brush-on sealer.

When my colored pencil work is complete I do give the project one more coating of reworkable fixitive to set that last layer of pencil work. Let the fixitive dry overnight.

Use ModPodge brush-on gloss sealer to seal the entire board - front, back, and all sides - to protect it from the weather. I use tow to three light coats, letting each coat dry for about one hour before applying the next.

It's time to set your Snow Gauge Gnome on the front porch where you can watch him slowly disappear in the next snow storm.
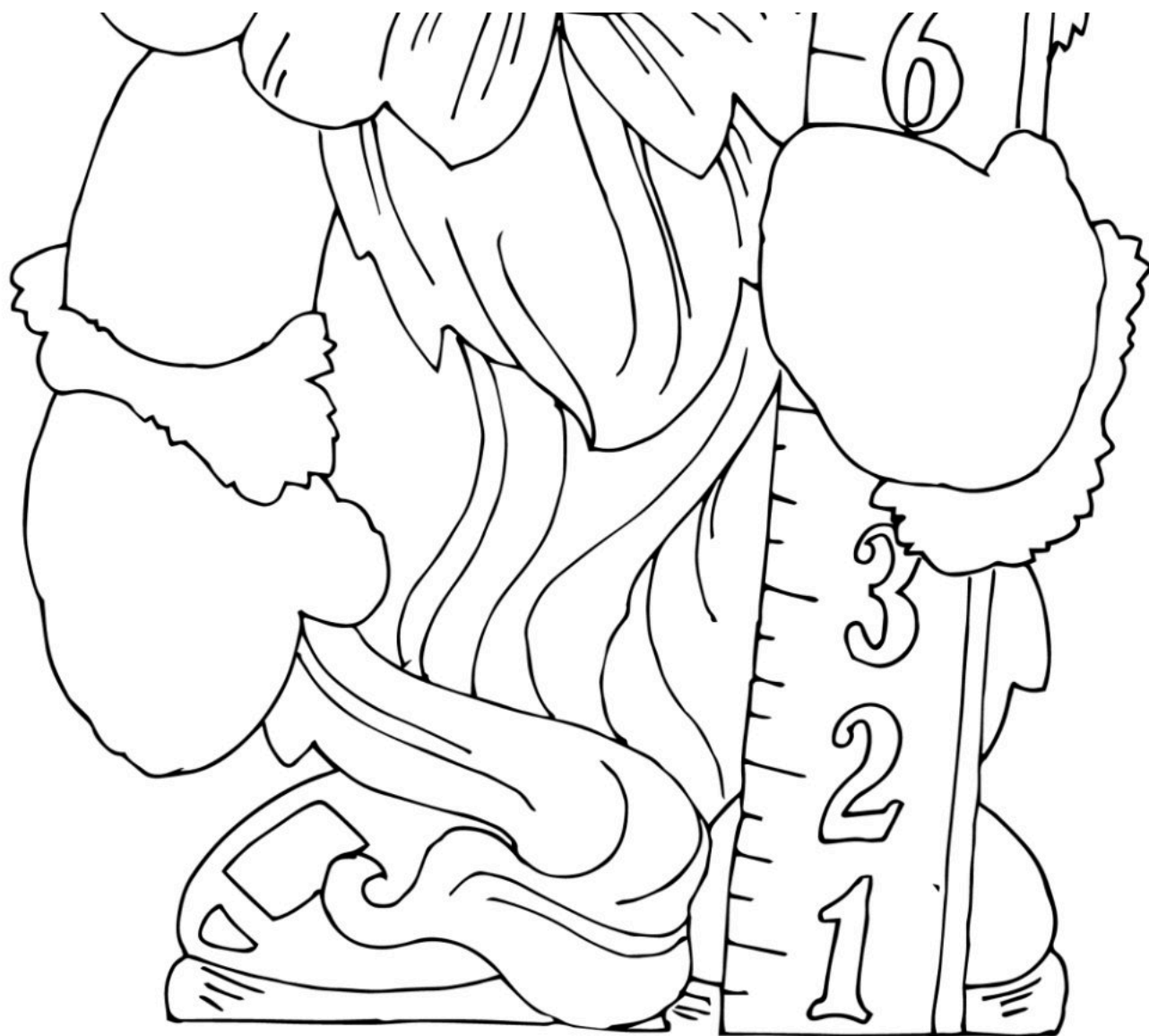
Hope you had fun!!!!
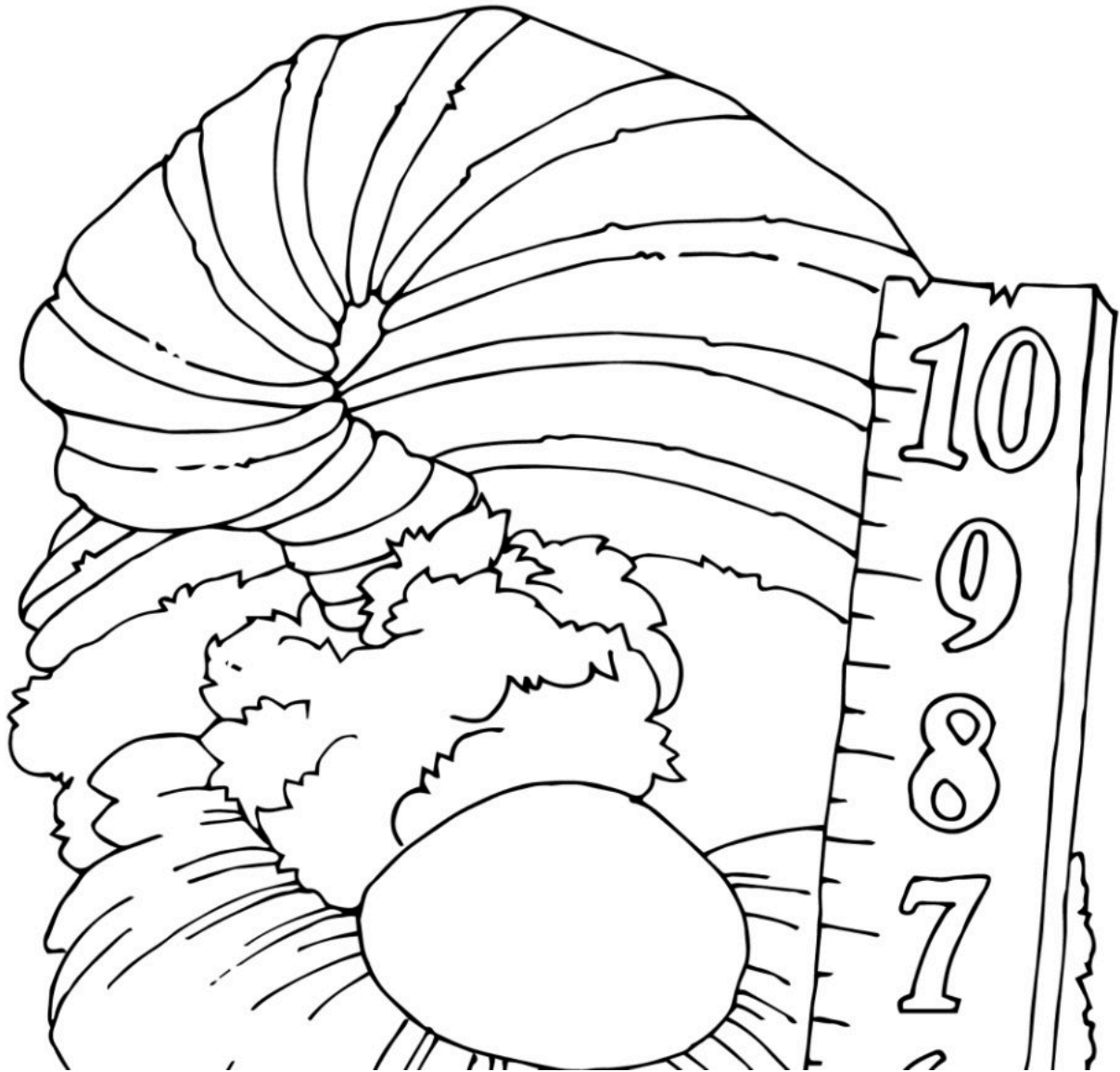
Top Gnome Snow Gauge Pattern

12" size

Bottom Gnome Snow Gauge Pattern

12" size

Gnome Snow Gauge Small

Please visit

ArtDesignsStudio.com

Lora Irish's Pattern Website

Over 3000 line art patterns,
+140 theme packages
ready for download
to use in your next crafting project.